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STATUS OF CLASSICAL STUDIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BY FRANK SMALLEY
Syracuse University

Successful business men study the market and seek to know the precise status of the particular branch of business in which they are engaged. Competition is intense, and constant vigilance is the condition of success. Teachers should emulate the example of business men. But someone may hold that there should be no competition in educational matters, that every branch should be sympathetic with all learning. Quite true; but there is a wide divergence of views as to the educational value of different subjects and how important a place they should have in the programme. A sympathetic interest in all learning may very well go with strong convictions of the relatively greater importance of certain branches. Feeling may not be as intense as formerly, but the rivalry is still strong. Changes are being continually made in the school curricula, and in the main probably for the better. An unbalanced programme is pedagogically harmful; it may even be pedagogically disastrous to the pupil. The eager advocacy of specialists is liable at any time to disturb the proper balance. Vigilance is always required. To illustrate: The advocates of certain subjects have been extremely active of late, emphasizing the importance of the branches of learning they represent and claiming a larger place in the work of the secondary schools. One would be blind to the facts if he failed to see that a large measure of success has attended these efforts—perhaps not too large as yet, but there is a constant possibility of an intemperate zeal resulting in unwise predominance. To add usually means to displace. Both might easily be harmful. Lovers of the classics should not be deceived because the fierce and unreasonable onslaughts of a few years ago have abated. There is still intense opposition to Greek and Latin, and this finds even offensive expression now and then at the meetings of this Association. It is our duty, therefore, first, to ascertain as well as we may what is the precise status of classical studies in our colleges and, especially, in our high schools at the present time, and second, to determine in what ways we may best foster classical learning, and secure and keep for it its rightful place in the curricula of the high school.

This paper is little more than an introduction to this important subject. It is a glance at the high school from the college standpoint. It presents some comparative data gathered from the Arts College of Syracuse University covering a period of twenty-seven years, together with a brief statement of entrance deficiencies in classics. Certain quite obvious inferences that have a bearing on the status of classical studies in the secondary schools will appear.

The data that have been gathered for the years and from the source indicated make on the whole an excellent showing for classical studies as compared with other courses. But a comparative study extending over a generation is pretty sure to show more or less decided tendencies.

The College of Liberal Arts, Syracuse University, has three general courses: The classical, requiring two years of Greek and two of Latin in college; the philosophical, requiring one year of Latin or of Greek in college (more than 99 per cent. take Latin); the science, requiring modern languages only. All the courses have the usual requirements for admission; the classical four years of Latin and three of Greek, etc.

A table is submitted (Table I) showing the number of students matriculated and the number graduated, for each class from 1879 to 1905, and the summaries by five-year periods, except that the last group covers seven years. It is an instructive study to note the relative numbers matriculated in the respective courses, and to compare one course with another and with itself at different times.

1. A peculiarity appears in the first year, 1879. It will be noticed that the number of students entering the classical course (1875) is 15, while the number graduated is 16; also in the philosophical course the corresponding figures are 7 and 11, while for the science course they are 10 and 2. A like peculiarity is seen in the philosophical course for 1881, for 1882, and for 1884. It is seen nowhere else in the table. It simply means that recruits were received in such courses during the four years. This does not much affect the accuracy of the table, because the same is true of every class in no great disparity of proportion, and may be neglected. It is almost confined to the philosophical course, which is much more likely than either of the others to receive recruits from the other two, while additions from without by transfer from other colleges come to all the courses. Again, if a student finds college Greek too difficult, he will petition to drop it and pass from the classical to the philosophical course. Such is the philosophy of the peculiarities noted.

2. Another noticeable feature is the rapid growth in numbers, especially in the last decade; but that is not peculiar to Syracuse, although the

TABLE I

CLASSES	MATRICULATED				GRADUATED			
	Cl	Ph	Sc	Total	C	Ph	Sc	Total
1879	15	7	10	32	16	11	2	29
1880	20	14	7	41	14	3	4	21
1881	24	7	2	33	21	9	2	32
1882	24	4	8	36	21	5	4	30
1883	15	15	4	34	15	11	0	26
Total ...	98	47	31	176	87	39	12	138
1884	20	7	8	35	12	8	2	22
1885	36	6	5	47	25	5	3	33
1886	42	15	10	67	28	5	1	34
1887	25	9	4	38	20	7	3	30
1888	23	12	15	50	16	9	8	33
Total ...	146	49	42	237	101	34	17	152
1889	28	9	8	45	20	4	3	27
1890	24	11	9	44	13	9	2	24
1891	30	18	15	63	22	9	7	38
1892	41	19	22	82	31	14	9	54
1893	30	29	20	79	23	15	8	46
Total ...	153	86	74	313	109	51	29	189
1894	47	46	17	110	37	21	5	63
1895	46	25	7	78	31	13	6	50
1896	37	30	10	77	25	16	6	47
1897	35	26	7	68	22	12	4	38
1898	43	31	14	88	27	16	5	48
Total ...	208	158	55	421	142	78	26	246
1899	48	32	17	97	26	28	9	63
1900	56	64	30	150	43	39	15	97
1901	59	48	14	121	44	38	7	89
1902	81	67	25	173	57	48	14	119
1903	68	94	18	180	43	51	14	108
1904	71	99	20	190	56	68	12	136
1905	71	111	29	211	50	81	15	146
Total ...	454	515	153	1,122	319	353	86	758

percentage here is not equaled elsewhere, perhaps, at least in culture courses.

3. The number of philosophical students (47) in the first half-decade is less than half the classical (98); in the second half-decade, less than a third (49, 146); in the third, more than half (86, 153); in the fourth,

more than two-thirds (158, 208); in the last seven years it exceeds the classical by 61. This increase is due in part to the fact that most women students avoid Greek and the sciences. Latin has evidently been elected in increasing numbers. This is not so much a matter of sex. The relation of the students in the science course to those in the classical is a trifle less than one-third in the first half-decade (31, 98) and a little over one-third in the last period of seven years, and varies considerably between these periods. The variation in the proportionate number of science students will be discussed later.

4. The numbers graduated from the first two courses are in proportion not greatly different from the matriculates. But graduates from the science course begin at less than a seventh of those of the classical course, run to nearly a fourth in the third half-decade, drop to less than a fifth in the fourth, and end at less than a fourth.

TABLE II

SHOWING BY PERIODS OF FIVE YEARS (EXCEPT THE LAST, WHICH IS A PERIOD OF SEVEN YEARS) THE PERCENTAGES OF CLASSICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND SCIENCE STUDENTS ENTERING AND THE PERCENTAGES OF THE WHOLE GRADUATING

CLASSES	ENTERED			GRADUATED		
	Cl.	Ph.	Sc.	Cl.	Ph.	Sc.
1879-1883.....	55.7	26.7	17.6	63.0	28.3	8.7
1884-1888.....	61.6	20.7	17.7	66.4	22.4	11.2
1889-1893.....	48.8	27.5	23.7	57.7	27.0	15.3
1894-1898.....	49.4	37.5	13.1	57.7	31.7	10.6
1899-1905.....	40.5	45.9	13.6	42.0	46.5	11.5

Let us consult Table II. In the first five years (1875-79) 176 students were matriculated in the three courses. Of these 55.7 per cent. were classical, 26.7 per cent. philosophical, and 17.6 per cent. science. Of the 138 who finished after four years' study, 63 per cent. were classical, 28.3 per cent. philosophical, 8.7 per cent. science. This is a gain of 7.3 per cent. for the classical, of 1.6 per cent. for the philosophical, and a loss of 8.9 per cent. for science. Note that the classics gain in every group—in the second nearly 5 per cent., more than 8 per cent. in the third and fourth, and 1.5 per cent. in the last. The philosophicals are more nearly uniform throughout, showing sometimes a slight gain, and at other times a little loss. The science course loses uniformly, most in the first group (8.9 per cent.) and least in the last (2.1 per cent.). The gain for classics drops from 7.3 to 1.5 per cent., while the losses of the science course decrease from 8.9 to 2.1 per cent.

TABLE III

SHOWING WHAT PERCENTAGE OF ENTERING FRESHMEN FINISHED THE FOUR YEARS AND WERE GRADUATED IN EACH COURSE

Classes	Entered	Graduated	Percentage
1879-1883—Classical.....	98	87	88.7
Philosophical.....	47	39	83.0
Science.....	31	12	38.7
Total.....	176	138	78.6
1884-1888—Classical.....	146	101	69.1
Philosophical.....	49	34	69.3
Science.....	42	17	40.4
Total.....	237	152	64.1
1889-1893—Classical.....	153	109	71.2
Philosophical.....	86	51	59.3
Science.....	74	29	39.2
Total.....	313	189	60.4
1894-1898—Classical.....	208	142	68.2
Philosophical.....	158	78	49.3
Science.....	58	26	47.2
Total.....	421	246	58.4
1899-1905—Classical.....	454	319	70.2
Philosophical.....	515	353	68.5
Science.....	153	86	56.2
Total.....	1,122	758	67.4

Table III shifts the point of view somewhat, but the results and tendencies are substantially the same. In the first period 98 classicals were matriculated and 87 were graduated; that is, 88.7 per cent. of all who entered; likewise 83 per cent. of the philosophicals and 38.7 of the science students. The classicals finish 10.1 per cent. above the average of 78.6 per cent.; while in science there is a falling off of almost exactly 40 per cent. Classics fare less well after the first, but in every case exceed the average; however, in the last group by only 2.8 per cent. Science graduates fall below the average only 21.2 per cent. in the third group, and only 11.2 per cent. in the last. The classicals dropped from 88.7 per cent. in the first group to 70.2 per cent. in the last. The science percentages rise from 38.7 to 56.2. For the science course the percentages also have been unfavorably affected in the last group by the establishment in 1902 of a College of Engineering, which has diverted students from all courses, but mainly from the science to a professional course.

These tables show us what may be termed the "persistency" in their

college work of students of different preparation and training. It has been generally claimed for the classically trained student that he has a better foundation on which to build, and is therefore more likely to persevere in his work. These statistics show clearly that the claim is well founded. The average persistency dropped, for the twenty-seven years covered, from 78.6 to 67.4 per cent., or 11.2 per cent., and it was a much greater drop in the intermediate groups. The latter is probably not due to any local influences, and can not be readily explained. Perhaps the fact that a large percentage of the young men have to earn board and room during their course, and the financial condition of the country, are factors. The Spanish-American War may have influenced the result in the most affected half-decade. The classicals have dropped 18.2 per cent., which considerably exceeds the average. They still, however, graduate a larger percentage of those who enter than do either of the others.

Another fact clearly shown is that, while classics are slowly declining (see table) in that persistency, science is gaining, and that pretty rapidly in the last decade, so that they are approaching one another. We can not shut our eyes to that fact, for the figures demonstrate it.

Turn again to Table II. The percentage of classical students among matriculates is there shown to decline from 61.6 in the second group to 40.5 in the last group, or 21.1 per cent. The percentage of science matriculates also declined 4.1, due probably, to a considerable extent, to the Engineering College, as stated above.

So much for the facts shown by the tables.

There must be some reason for the decline of persistency, as well as for a falling off in the proportion of students entering the classical course, and for an opposite tendency with science students. But before seeking a definite cause, let us note another fact that appears on the books of the college. In a class of 204 students—classical and philosophical sections—deficient preparation for college in classical studies appears as follows: Caesar (part), 1, Cicero (part), 21, Vergil (all or part, excluding *Eclogues*), 33; Latin prose, 24; Roman history, 25; *Anabasis*, 13; *Iliad*, 13; Greek prose, 2; Greek history, 25. That is, 16 per cent. of the class are deficient in the *Aeneid*, 10 per cent. in Cicero, 13 per cent. in Greek and Roman history, 11 per cent. in Latin prose, 30 per cent. of those taking Greek, in the *Iliad* (one book or more), 27 per cent. in the *Anabasis*, etc. In a more recent class of 278 in the two sections a similar deficiency appears. Here 18 per cent. are deficient in some part of Vergil, 8 per cent. in Cicero, 6 per cent. in Greek and Roman history, 7 per cent. in Latin prose, 14 per cent. in the *Iliad*, 9 per cent. in the *Anabasis*, etc. This state of

things is not new, but is, I think, a trifle worse than it was two decades ago; at least it is not better. On the contrary, while students enter college with some deficiencies in the sciences, those deficiencies are growing constantly less, as well as less serious. A much larger proportion are excellently prepared in the various sciences than was the case even five years ago.

There is probably no reason to think that like statistics from other colleges of the State, with due regard to different classification of courses, would materially change the showing and tendency here presented.

If the foregoing, then, is a sober statement of facts, as it must be apparent that it is, the classical teacher is bound to inquire for the reasons, and, if classics are valuable in education, as we think they are, to find some means or method of securing for them their proper place in the programmes and of maintaining their prestige. Prestige based on the highest merit will decline unless fostered by legitimate means.

Perhaps it would not be out of place just here to offer a possible explanation of deficient preparation as one of the counts against classics. Two causes seem plausible, and both share the responsibility: first, premature application for admission to college, and, second, crowding by other subjects in the secondary school.

The long supremacy of classics in education is due to the superior preparation and work of the classical teacher, to the prestige and disciplinary character of his subject, to its superiority as an instrument of education, and to its exceedingly helpful relation to English grammar and English expression. Other and great advantages might be added in a more complete analysis. Have recent days brought deterioration in all or any of these particulars? Probably not. Neither have they brought improvement; and that is just where the trouble mainly is.

It must be remembered, as before hinted, that the teachers of English have of late been pushing that subject to the front very energetically. The same is true of the teachers of history and, above all, of the teachers of the sciences. The latter especially have effective organizations, and have so insisted on what they deem their rights that they are revolutionizing high-school instruction. Their activity, together with the wonderful discoveries in science, has naturally secured the attention and favor of the public, and as a result even small country schools are putting in excellent and expensive equipments for work in the sciences. Now, we may and do rejoice at this, and are still consistent. Still further, the colleges are sending out men and women well trained as teachers of science, which was not the case until quite recently. What can be

expected from all this but just what we are witnessing, and what our statistics undeniably prove?

The fact is, the race is getting too swift for the classics, which have counted on their prestige and are falling in the rear. We are indeed enjoying a reaction from the attacks of a decade ago and earlier; nor do we forget the wonderful advance for Latin reported by Commissioner Harris for the years 1889-98. Open attacks, made mainly by persons unacquainted with ancient life, languages, and civilization, and their contributions to our own times, are not permanently harmful, but, on the contrary, are helpful in the end by quickening the zeal of the lovers of these sources of culture and their missionary activity. But we are trying to point out something subtler and really dangerous. The cold facts shown by these tabulated figures and percentages are very significant, and make it clear that the promoters of classics must bestir themselves.

What, then, is the duty of the hour? What is required of us?

1. We need better-trained teachers. The merits of the classics are a constant factor and require no argument before this Association. But of what service is that fact, if they are not taught skilfully in the secondary school? It is there that the battle must be fought. It is indeed true that many men and women of the highest culture and excellent qualifications are to be found among the teachers of Greek and Latin in our high schools, seminaries, and academies. And it is very largely due to them that these subjects are so generally held in high respect and are elected by the brightest students. All praise to these teachers! None honor our profession more. But, unfortunately, there are so many poorly qualified and inexperienced teachers that it is a marvel that so large a number of pupils persist in classical study through the high-school course and enter college as well prepared as they actually do. How many persons are teaching Caesar who can not pronounce a page of the author accurately? And I do not now refer to the refinements of hidden quantities. The great majority of our classical teachers sorely need better training both in the matter and in the pedagogy of their subject. This can not be emphasized too much. It ought to be the keynote of every classical organization—the insistence on a high standard, on competency and skill in our teachers. Far more skill is required to do correctly and efficiently the beginning work, and that of the first years, than for subsequent work. Can we not do as well as the science teachers have done? Shall we stand still while they are advancing so vigorously?

2. We need better equipment in the secondary schools—maps, pictures, lanterns, statuary, etc.

Skilful and enthusiastic teachers, working with a good equipment, and a keen appreciation of the value and the cultural and pedagogical importance of classical study, will soon work wonders. Genuine enthusiasm for a subject comes with large knowledge, and is peculiarly contagious for the bright and earnest pupil longing for a like knowledge. The classical teacher handles a magnificently inspiring subject. But he must have a broad and intimate acquaintance with Greek and Roman civilization, including history and literature especially, and must be filled with sincere admiration for the unparalleled attainments of classic peoples in art, civic organization, and legal development. The hope of the classics in the race, the pace of which is so rapidly increasing, rests almost solely on the well-trained, thoroughly informed, enthusiastic, and skilful teacher of the secondary school, and the environment that he will naturally compel.